

The Wellesley College Class of 1956 presents

# SCARLET LETTERS

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*Autumn Berries* by Jean Fairgrieve Swensen Granum.

Dear Readers,

It occurred to your editors that we might enjoy a Book Recommendations column every now and then, so here we are, looking to know what you are reading. We know that Wellesley has its own Book Club, but it seems more relevant somehow to see what our esteemed classmates are reading.

I remember so well when I learned to read. I was about five, in the back seat of the family car, which stopped at a stop sign. Suddenly, I knew what that word was: “Stop”! I could read! I could read! (and I haven’t stopped since).

My latest read was *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Reid. A strange title, but the book is about one of those Hollywood types who marry over and over, like Elizabeth Taylor. It’s a strange title and she is certainly no literary giant; it’s a nice low-key summer read. The book is pretty lightweight, but I found myself reaching for it again and again. A nice light summer read.

I’ve also recently read Michelle Obama’s latest, *The Light We Carry*. I have great respect for Michelle, and I find her suggestions for living a constructive life very powerful. This book, however enjoyable, was not quite as good as her first, *Becoming*. Please tell us what you are reading and send in your suggestions. And if by any chance you have written something, tell us right away so we can spread the word!

Sheila Owen Monks, smonks341@gmail.com

*Scarlet Letters* will continue to publish letters about our housing decisions, such as the following from Margaret Gontrum:

I have never appreciated *Scarlet Letters* as much as I did this month's issue about the Retirement Homes. After years of silence, I can't resist responding to yours and others' evidence of surprise, relief, and gratitude that the decision to move was a good one.

I join you in those thoughts, and will add more; a voice commands me to "speak up, speak up for Cascade Manor!"--my new home, since last September. Sure, the move was exhausting (though not as bad as Maud's account). Selling a much loved home, saying goodbye to cherished neighbors, leaving behind a garden and its view of changing seasons, and replacing them with a small apartment, new names to learn, and a landscape of unfamiliar bushes and trees--all that was not easy.

Several classmates mentioned that earlier would have been easier. I agree with that; in September I was pushing 88--definitely an upper limit for the proper age to do this. Fortunately, I had help from my daughter, my son and his wife and two grandchildren--they taught me how to use the appliances--especially the washer and dryer, now no longer located in the basement reached by daunting stairs. They even helped me make new friends. I discovered new foods to eat (and not cook), a tai chi practice designed for the elderly, a warmer pool to swim in, well lighted sidewalks for my early morning "strolls". Perhaps the word "gratitude" resonates most with me. I am grateful to those nurses in the main building who are reachable by phone or buzzer. I know I can ask them to help me with minor ailments, and would be there for me as I age, and ailments get more serious.

I am grateful for the companionship of other "elderly" residents who understand and sympathize; others who I sense will be there for greater challenges. Then there are the younger residents (many in their mid 70's) who take on responsibilities (organizing and conducting lectures, scheduling concerts and visiting entertainment) that I am happy to leave to them.

As for our changing or ultimate destinations, every week or two, residents need more, or higher levels of care, either in their rooms or in a designated part of this institution. (The majority of our residents in my newer building are in their seventies, so I don't hear much about their problems.) So we get used to the idea of death, its reality less dreaded--part of the normal course of life.

To end on a brighter note, I am incredibly lucky to have several Eugeneans as friends, especially those who were my husband Peter's former colleagues. (He taught German Literature at the UO.) Their working world was similar to his, and we have a great time discovering similar memories, gossiping about former colleagues. Some of my new friends are parents of my former students at a local high school where I taught. All this is like a reincarnation for me; I've been mentally as well as physically "reborn."

Also lucky to have my freshman roommate, Ray Gramentine, as a correspondent. She and her late husband Jim moved last year to a Milwaukee retirement home. Who knew, when we met in Beebe in 1952, that we would be sharing impressions of our new homes in 2022!

To conclude (sorry this is so long): I feel "at home" in ways that I never dreamed of. It helps to have a daughter nearby, a son, and daughter 1--1 1/2 hours flight away. And my home can boast of buildings named for my beloved mountains and rivers: the Cascades for the main building, McKenzie and Willamette for the two newer ones.

With appreciation for all your efforts to collect and publish these,

Maggie G., [margaret.gontrum@gmail.com](mailto:margaret.gontrum@gmail.com)

Here are two more responses:

Unlike those writing from senior residencies, I have no plan/opportunity to do this. As I don't have the funds for this option.

My mother in her 70s made the decision to do this in an effort to relieve me and my sister of caring for her in her older years. She was more than able, drove her own car, had a job, traveled annually. In 1988 she moved into a very forward-looking residence which pioneered in this kind of care. She lived until 93. She had run out of money, but the director of the residence made an executive decision that mother's monthly SS check would suffice to keep her in place. I will be ever grateful, obviously. When my husband died thirty years ago, I was advised to create a long-term care plan wherein I could stay in my modest apartment in Manhattan where I have been for more than fifty years. The plan covers the cost of minimum care-giver, etc. For now, I do all my cleaning, shopping, cooking. I attend live events and exhibitions—often on my own! Realistically this isn't forever; but one doesn't control any of this. We just do the best we can. Two sons live sort-of near-by but not in the city; I don't count on them as a solution in my next years but neither do I think they will completely abandon me."

Gayle Abouchar Jaeger, [gayle.jaeger@gmail.com](mailto:gayle.jaeger@gmail.com)

### Staying Put

Scarlet Letters' recent publication featuring class members moving to retirement communities was among our most popular issues. We hope that others will share their experiences about their living situations as well as other important decisions that our (ahem!) mature Wellesley graduates have made with their lives. We value the experiences of others. I've now been married for three times as long as I was single, sixty-eight years as of August 19<sup>th</sup> 2023. I am very fortunate that my husband is still with me. Richard and I have lived in many nice middle-class houses in several states funded by his income teaching American history at various colleges. We made the last move in 1989 when we moved to New York City for his job at Columbia University.

That year coincided with the end of the secondary education of our six children. We no longer needed good public schools or houses with multiple bedrooms, garages with basketball hoops, and spacious yards. When Columbia offered to rent us one of their many Upper West Side apartments, we said yes. They offered us our current place, promising to paint, update the plumbing, redo the floors, and make it fresh and attractive, which they did.

Our building on Riverside Drive dates from about 1904. It's tall and narrow. Our tenth floor has just three apartments, a couple of them across the front of the building and a wider, shallower one across the back. Richard and I live in one of the front ones. The other two are occupied by single male Columbia academics. We are all cordial, but not close. We have privacy, quiet, and very little traffic. Our visiting family members are responsible for any noise.

The apartment seemed small. Two bedrooms instead of our previous five, a small one-person kitchen. But there was an elevator, a good-sized dining room, as well as a spacious front hall and living room. The three front rooms allowed space for various entertaining. I have hosted discussion groups and wedding receptions and served sit-down dinners for more than twenty guests.

The apartment also offered a small “maid’s room” off the kitchen with a full private bath. That has become our guest suite for single guests and is often home to one or another of our twenty grandchildren. Our two bedrooms double as offices. Multiple guests require some temporary rearranging, but the space serves us well.

And we have large windows from the living room and the master bedroom with a thrilling view of Riverside Park, the Hudson River, the distant New Jersey shore, and lots of sky. A spectacular sunset is laid on every evening. We never see the sunrise, but oh, those sunsets!

Richard retired from Columbia twenty-two years ago, but we have stayed on. We sold our Little Pink Home in the West to our son. We gave away our car. We ride the subway and the bus. We have our groceries delivered. We walk to the doctor or the hospital when necessary. We mostly stick to Manhattan.

When one of us goes, we hope that one of our children or grandchildren who would like to live and work in New York will come to share this wonderful space.

Claudia Lauper Bushman, [claudia.bushman@gmail.com](mailto:claudia.bushman@gmail.com)

Please continue to send us your writings. Here’s one from Judy Bruder.

#### DID I EVER TELL YOU ABOUT MISS O’CONNOR?

She was the English teacher I had for my sophomore year in high school. Marion O’Conner. Irish, of course, a spinster, a faded strawberry blonde with snapping eyes and a sweet smile. She was almost always smiling at us, although she could be peppery enough when necessary. Miss O’Connor’s classroom was always orderly.

The most impressive thing I remember about her was that whenever someone sneezed, Miss O’Connor would stop dead right in the middle of a sentence and intone, “God bless you and keep you and protect you from the dangers of this world, Amen.”

All in one breath, one sentence, was how she actually said it, Godblessyouandkeepyouandprotectyoufromthedangersofthisworldamen, and then she’d pick up exactly where she had left off, as if no interruption, or blessing, had happened. But of course, it had.

It was a blessing to be in Miss O’Connor’s classroom. She loved her students, and I think we all knew it. Whether we liked English or not, or reading or school, it didn’t matter. Miss O’Connor loved us, and we loved her right back. We sensed she really would protect us from the dangers of this world if she possibly could, but of course she couldn’t. No one can.

We, some of us, like Miss O’Connor, go right on blessing those we love, knowing it won’t and it can’t protect them. But, after all, what else can we do?

Judith Mandell Bruder, [tsarinaxyz@gmail.com](mailto:tsarinaxyz@gmail.com)

The following article is copied from a column of alumni news from the publication of Geneva's alma mater, the Shady Hill School.



Genevra Osborn Higginson brings an artist's perspective to everything she does. She started her career as an educator in art and art history and culminated as the Chief of Protocol and Special Events at the National Gallery of Art, a post she held for 22 years. The Protocol Chief position married her love of art with the intercultural skills and foreign language fluency she'd honed over decades of living in Europe and North Africa during her husband's foreign service postings.

A protocol officer must be a good facilitator, negotiator, researcher, conversationalist, networker, and event organizer. Genevra oversaw countless installations and special events marking exhibit openings, often hosting international VIPs. Having a deep understanding of culture and appropriate representation was key, in every case, and led to her receiving a number of foreign awards, including a Japan Foundation Travel and Study Grant, and the award of Officer of the order of Arts and Letters of France.

For instance, when the National Gallery mounted a "Matisse in Morocco" exhibition, Genevra called upon her experience living in that region to curate an event for the esteemed guests with flavors, sights, and sounds that were authentic and culturally appropriate. One of her highest-stake assignments came in 1986, when the National Gallery of Art exchanged works of art with The Hermitage (in what was then Leningrad, now St. Petersburg), following a high-profile summit agreement signed in Geneva. This collaboration between US and Soviet

museums represented significant inter-governmental rapprochement after years of political estrangement.

Understandably, the world was watching as Russian First Lady Raisa Gorbachev attended the exhibit's opening in Washington. "No one knew quite what to expect, since there had been such a freeze for the past seven years," says Geneva. Per the protocol, American press could be present, but they were not allowed to ask Mrs. Gorbachev any questions. "She impressed everyone by stopping periodically during her tour to engage with the press. She was warm and lively, curious, and intelligent."

True to form, Geneva had thoughtfully prepared for the high stakes visit; every detail was in order. Just one example: in keeping with Russian tradition, Geneva had arranged for a little girl to present a small flower bouquet to Mrs. Gorbachev; in return the little girl was gifted a special box of Russian chocolates.

These examples illustrate the cross-cultural competence required of a protocol officer. Looking back at her career, Geneva reflects, "My studies were put to use in ways I couldn't have imagined. I got to travel and expand my knowledge living and learning cross cultures." Geneva noted that "The love of learning all started at 'her preparatory school' Shady Hill."

That love certainly continued at Wellesley College.



*Mountaintop View* by Jean Fairgrieve Swensen Granum

## *Mercy*

It is our first encounter, at the height of the opioid epidemic, when Every use of an opioid invites scrutiny.

He walks into the little examining room In what approximates a stride for a man Too big for this space.

"So it's your shoulder," he says companionably.

"Yes," I say hesitantly, "surely not so bad it needs surgery, but

"Still it's a problem. Stiff, sore."

"Stand in front of me," he directs. "Now,

"Raise your arm."

I comply, up to the height of that shoulder.

Perhaps I have exaggerated; I try again, with the same results.

His eyebrows rise.

"Have you ever seen an x-ray of your shoulder?"

He asks, gently curious. Of course, I haven't, and

He leads me through it. "There," he says,

"That's where it's bone on bone." It looks bad, but small.

"I think you need some medication," he offers simply. I recite the sorry tale of being at the maximum dose Of other medications for other problems.

I've Googled this at home.

"So wouldn't it have to be an opioid?" I demur, "And wouldn't there be the risk of addiction?

"Surely it's not that bad."

Frowning gently, he says authoritatively, "You see what the x-ray shows.

"This is too bad for no treatment.

"You don't want surgery yet.

"So that leaves us with the middle level, which is medication.

"No, I think you need that medication." Smiling abstractedly, his fingers move by Familiar hunt and peck over his keyboard. "It will be waiting at your pharmacy when  
"You get home."

It will appear not only in my record but In his.

Surely, he knows what he's given me:

Hours, days of surcease. I

am silenced, and

Can only bow my head.

Will I find someone like this at the

End?

Joan Miles Oliver (oliverjm1@sbcglobal.net)

# 10 Things We Can Do to Help Save Earth



The earth will certainly not be lost in our time, but it's going. We should do our best to save it for our grandchildren and our greats. The truth is, that at the moment, we have no planet B.

The United Nations suggests that climate change is not just the defining issue of our time, but that we are also at a defining moment in history. Weather patterns are changing and will threaten food production. Sea levels are rising and could cause catastrophic flooding across the globe. Countries must make drastic actions to avoid a future with irreversible damage to major ecosystems and planetary climate.

But what about individuals? What can we do to pitch in and help save Earth? You already know all this, but here are some things we can do every day to help reduce greenhouse gases and your carbon footprints to make a less harmful impact on the environment. Taking care of Earth is not just a responsibility, it's a necessity. In that spirit, HowStuffWorks has come up with 10 things you can do now to help save the planet: 1. Conserve Water; 2. Be Car-conscious; 3. Walk, Bike or Take Public Transit; 4. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle; 5. Give Composting a Try; 6. Switch to LEDs; 7. Live Energy Wise; 8. Eat Sustainable Foods; 9. Plant a Tree (or Two); 10. Give Up Plastics.

We have to save the earth. Because so far, it is the only completely habitable planet with fresh water, food and oxygen for thousands of species, including ours.

Let's avoid bottled water, walk more and drive less, avoid wasting food, compost and switch to LED lightbulbs.

We do not know how long the earth has before becoming uninhabitable, but we are headed in that direction. Humans, animals and ecosystems around the globe are already experiencing the negative effects of climate change.

More pollution raises Earth's temperature to rise, causing increased natural disasters, the destruction of habitats, and many other serious problems.